Teacher and student perceptions of second language writing feedback:
A survey of six college ESL classes and their teachers

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Abstract

Research on second language writing has focused on feedback practices and student revision processes. The purpose of this study is to examine students’ and teachers’ feelings and thoughts in regards to written feedback, and to compare these perceptions with teacher self-assessments. Both teachers and students in university level English as second language (ESL) writing courses were surveyed about their perceptions of teacher written feedback. Results indicated that they showed no particular preference for any single type of feedback and that students were generally satisfied with the type and amount of feedback that they were given. Additionally, both teachers and students placed the burden of error correction on each other. These and other findings are discussed in light of the context and suggest that teachers should be aware of their students’ perceptions when employing their feedback approaches.
Background for the Present Study

Providing effective feedback is one of the many challenges that any writing teacher faces. In a second language classroom, feedback practices can be even more challenging; in addition to organization and punctuation problems, grammar feedback is also a concern. Teachers and students agree that teacher written feedback is a crucial part of the writing process (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990). Teachers want to give feedback that will encourage and challenge students to be better writers, but do not always know how the feedback that they are providing is perceived by the students, or how effective it is. Since reading student work and giving feedback is a very time-consuming process, teachers may feel frustrated when the feedback they offer is not followed by the students. Even when the teacher’s system for giving feedback is clear and consistent, oftentimes teachers do not know whether students understand their practices. This study examines teachers’ perceptions of feedback in the form of error correction and follow-up practices and compared these with students’ perceptions and beliefs about these practices. In a survey of 47 students and six teachers in a university English as a second language setting, I explored several questions about the feedback amount, type, beliefs, and the degree of satisfaction. The purpose of this paper is to examine and compare the relationship between students’ and teachers’ perceptions of written feedback in the second language classroom.

Does Feedback Matter?

There has been much debate among researchers on second language writing about the effects of different kinds of feedback. One of the hottest issues in the past fifteen years has been whether grammar feedback is either necessary or helpful for L2 learning. As one main opponent of grammar feedback, Truscott (1996) concluded that all forms of error correction of L2 student
writing are ineffective and should be abandoned. Ferris (1999) countered Truscott’s argument by delineating the ways that learners use feedback to improve their writing. While this debate is interesting, most writing teachers give both grammar and content feedback to their students. Whether or not grammar feedback is effective, students expect it and believe that it will help their writing (Hyland, 1998; Casanave, 2003).

Other research investigated other aspects of feedback, such as the effects of manipulating the type of feedback given by teachers (Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Leki, 1991). ESL writing teachers’ actual response practices were examined and compared with research of L1 writing teachers practices (Zamel, 1985). More recently, researchers have called into question the methods for researching writing (Guénette, 2007; Truscott, 2007) and called for researchers to be more exact in their methods.

Ferris (1997) introduced a new approach to research in this area. The approach made connections between teacher feedback and the revisions the students made as a result. Ferris did not manipulate the type of feedback given, but instead classified comments made by the teacher according to length, functional type, and use of hedges. Revisions made by students were rated according to whether they were substantive or minimal and also whether they had a positive or negative effect. Ferris found that marginal requests for information and summary comments on grammar appeared to lead to the most substantive revisions. Ashwell (2000) used Ferris’ model to test Zamel’s (1985) hypothesis that two or more drafts are an important part of the writing process as a whole. In using this method, Ashwell examined whether content followed by form is the best way to provide feedback to students. He found that there is no significant overall difference in papers that are given form feedback followed by content feedback as opposed to content followed by form. All this research on the effectiveness of actual feedback practices begs
the equally important question of what the specific preferences might be of those receiving and giving feedback in the classroom, namely students and teachers.

**A New Perspective: Perceptions of Feedback**

The perspective of writing students has been investigated in several ways such as students’ preferences and reactions to feedback (Cohen, 1987; Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris, 1995). Studies on students’ perceptions of written feedback have shown that they have strong opinions and preferences about the amount and type of feedback given by their teachers. Zhang (1995) found that ESL students greatly value teacher written feedback and consistently rate it more highly than alternative forms such as peer feedback and oral feedback in writing conferences.

An important study by Cohen (1987) surveyed 217 students in a university setting on the amount and the effectiveness of teacher-written feedback. He found that students prefer feedback on local issues like sentence-level feedback such as grammar rather than global feedback such as end comments. In a similar study, Ferris (1995) surveyed 155 students and added to Cohen’s findings that students pay more attention to feedback given during the writing and revising process rather than feedback given on a final draft. These findings show students’ strong preference for local feedback and also demonstrate how much students use this feedback to improve their writing.

In researching whether students understand feedback in the same way that the teacher intended it, Hyland (2003) found that students often misunderstood their teachers’ comments or suggestions. Hyland and Hyland (2001) investigated the role of praise and found that it was often
perceived by students as a way to soften criticism rather than to encourage them to continue writing.

The above research on student preferences and perceptions about feedback has been the main focus of research on L2 feedback perceptions. The teachers’ perceptions in the form of self-assessment or self-report of feedback are rarely studied and only a few have been compared to the student’s perceptions. There are numerous variables and factors that affect feedback practices, and recently there have been calls for more research to investigate feedback in terms of comparing student perceptions with teacher self-assessments and actual teacher feedback (Goldstein, 2001, 2006).

A seminal study that relates student and teacher feedback perceptions was conducted by Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990). In examining teachers’ self-assessments with student perceptions and actual written feedback in this study in a university EFL setting, they found a strong relationship between teacher self-assessments and actual performance in all of the categories that they examined (content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics). In an innovative, more recent study in an EFL context in Hong Kong, Lee (2003) compared teachers’ feedback beliefs with teachers’ feedback practices. She found that although many teachers believe in giving selective error correction feedback, most teachers surveyed still mark papers comprehensively. Lee (2004) also compared teachers and students’ beliefs in Hong Kong. She employed a similar approach to her first study in researching teacher beliefs, but added the extra element of comparing teacher beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions to student beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. She found that both students and teachers in this context preferred comprehensive marking and that teachers use only limited strategies in their feedback practices. Even more recently, Montgomery and Baker (2007) used a similar approach to that of Cohen and Cavalcanti
(1990) but with a much larger sample size: while Cohen and Cavalcanti used only one teacher and nine students, this study surveyed 98 students and ten teachers. They found that teachers’ perceptions of the amount of feedback that they give are generally lower than students’ perceptions. In investigating the relationship between the teachers’ beliefs and actual feedback provided, they found, in agreement with Lee (2003) that teachers may not have provided feedback in the way that they believed they should.

**Purpose**

The studies above have investigated several important areas of feedback and have laid the foundation and opened the door for more research. Hyland (2006) encouraged research to “go beyond the individual act of feedback itself to consider the factors that influence feedback options and student responses” (p.10). While there has been research on practices, types, effectiveness, interpretation of feedback, and so on, few studies have been done about the affective factors that influence feedback, namely the feelings of satisfaction with amount and type. The present study seeks to build upon the previous research by examining how students feel about the amount and type of feedback that they are getting and how teachers perceive their students’ feelings. More precisely, I seek to examine the relationship between teacher self-assessments and student perceptions of teacher written feedback by examining the following questions:

1. How similar or different are students’ and teachers’ perceptions in regards to feedback amount and type?
2. How content are students with the amount of feedback that they are receiving, and by comparison do teachers believe that their students are satisfied or dissatisfied with their feedback?

3. How favorably are various techniques for the delivery of feedback viewed by students?

4. Whose job is to correct errors, according to students and teachers?

The answers to these questions will help teachers to better understand the effects of their feedback on students. They may also help to inform teachers about which type of feedback is more effective in their context.

**Method**

**Context of the Present Study**

This study takes place in an ESL context in a university English Language Institute (ELI). Students at the ELI consist of international and immigrant students for whom English is not their native language. The main purpose of the ELI is to provide English instruction to facilitate these students’ academic studies. ELI teachers are mainly graduate-assistant instructors chosen from MA and PhD candidates in this university’s Second Language Studies department. ELI classes are semester-long and consist of 2.5 hours of instruction per week. The teachers and students surveyed were currently teaching or enrolled in an ELI writing class. The survey took place about three weeks before the end of the semester, so feedback practices were most likely well-implemented by this point.

In the process of developing this research proposal, it was necessary to get approval from the Director of the ELI in order to conduct a research project at the ELI. The steps for approval included reading research that has already been completed at the ELI so as not to create an
overlap, and having the research proposal and the instruments (surveys) approved by both the advising professor and the ELI director. This study was also approved by the university’s Committee on Human Studies, which included submitting a summary of the proposed research, the instruments (surveys), and signed approval of the advising professor.

There were seven writing classes being held at the ELI at the time the study was conducted. All seven teachers elected to participate in the study. I came to each face-to-face class during the last five minutes of instruction and explained the survey, then returned at the beginning of the following class to collect the surveys. One of the participating classes was an online class, and the survey was explained in an email. In analyzing the results from the courses, I found that feedback practices in this online class were quite different from the others classes surveyed. Moreover, no response was received from the teacher of the online course and few responses were received from the students. Since an important aspect of this paper is to compare the students’ perceptions with the teacher’s, I only consider data from the six face-to-face ELI writing classes that was collected.

The three writing classes (ELI 73, ELI 83 and ELI 100) surveyed contain students of varying levels of proficiency, within a range of levels advanced enough to take university classes (a score of 500 on the paper-based TOEFL is required to enter into the university). ELI 73 consists of a mix of undergraduate and graduate students. ELI 83 is an advanced course for graduate students only, while ELI 100 is an advanced course for undergraduates. The classes also have different course objectives. ELI 100 must be taken by non-native speakers of English as an alternative to English 100, the required English course for undergraduate students at this university.
Participants

The participants in the present study include students and teachers from two ELI 100 classes, two ELI 83 classes, and two ELI 73 classes. The predominant first language of the ELI students surveyed is Japanese, followed by Korean and Chinese. While students in ELI 100 are fairly similar in age, the age range in graduate-level ELI 83 is a bit more diverse. Because of the nature of ELI 73 including both graduates and undergraduates, a wide range of ages is represented in this case as well.

Table 2
Participants by Age and Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Number of Participating Students</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Median Age</th>
<th>Native Language Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18-37</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>5 Japanese, 3 Korean, 3 Chinese, 1 Tibetan, 1 Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23-34</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>6 Japanese, 8 Chinese, 3 Thai, 1 Vietnamese, 1 Bahasa Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>8 Japanese, 3 Korean, 1 Chinese, 1 Cantonese, 1 Portuguese, 1 Swedish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participating students and teachers provided informed consent (see Appendix A for consent form). An important measure in this research was ensuring the confidentiality of students and teachers and making sure that they knew their rights to participate or choose not to participate with no penalty.

1 Adapted from ELI website: http://www.hawaii.edu/eli/students/newstudents.html
Survey Design

The data were elicited by means of a questionnaire based on a hybrid of the surveys used in Cohen (1987), Ferris (1995), Montgomery and Baker (2007), and Lee (2004). The final instruments are shown in Appendices B and C. The surveys focused on three areas: feedback amount, feedback type, and feedback beliefs.

In their questionnaire, teachers were asked to self-assess how much of each type of feedback (ideas/content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics) they gave on compositions throughout the past semester. They were also asked about their grammar correction practices and whether students knew how to understand their markings.

The students were asked similar questions to their teacher in the survey. In addition, they were also asked how much they consider their teachers’ comments on their essays, if they are satisfied with the amount of feedback they receive, if the teacher uses a correction code, to what degree they understand the teacher’s correction code, and whose job they feel it is to find and correct errors.

One important element in these surveys is that often the same questions are asked separately about both 1st or 2nd drafts and final drafts. Zamel (1985) called these drafts “cycles of revision” (p. 95). She suggested having stages in the feedback process. Now common practice amongst writing teachers, there are often at least one or two drafts plus a final version in the writing process. Therefore, there are a few questions in two parts, for the students and teachers to differentiate between feedback during the beginning or end of the cycle. Some teachers may believe that feedback is more or less effective at certain points in the writing cycle, and may provide different amounts and types of feedback respectively. It should also be noted that the
teachers’ survey had more questions about feedback beliefs, since the teachers decide what type and how much feedback is appropriate for each class or for each individual student.

Data Collection and Analysis

Out of the 73 surveys distributed to these six classes, I received 47 in return, a response rate of 64%. The high response rate might be attributed to the fact that in my role as the researcher I approached the class in person to explain and distribute the survey during class time and came to collect them at the beginning of the next class. The data was collected and entered by two researchers, and cross-checked for accuracy. I will use descriptive statistics in presenting the results of the surveys. In anticipation that the data from these classes would represent different perspectives, the data will be compared both as a whole, grouped by course, and as single classes.

The remainder of this paper is devoted to the presentation of my data analysis and to the discussion of the findings related to my four research questions. As I present and discuss results, I will highlight interesting findings and draw implications to pedagogy relative to feedback practices. The paper will conclude with an acknowledgement of the limitations of the study and some implications.

Results and Discussion

RQ 1: How similar or different are students’ and teachers’ perceptions in regards to feedback amount and type?

Deciding feedback amount is an important part of the feedback process. As mentioned above, Cohen (1987) found that students prefer more feedback in certain areas such as grammar
and less on global issues. In the present study, teachers were asked to self-assess how much feedback they gave on compositions throughout the past semester. As shown in Appendix C, the feedback was divided into types; ideas/content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. They were asked to choose an amount for each type of feedback that was an average of the feedback they generally gave to their students. Basically, teachers were asked to estimate the total amount of feedback given on first and final drafts of their students’ compositions and rank the amount of feedback on a Likert scale with choices of “none,” “a little,” “some,” and “a lot.” The descriptions were supplemented with percentages that clarified the categories: 0%, 30%, 70%, and 100%. For instance, if teachers thought that they commented on every grammatical error in a paper, they would mark 100%, if they purposefully marked only some of the errors, they would mark 70%. Students were also asked to evaluate their teacher’s written feedback using a similar response format (see Appendix B). The results are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1
Feedback Perceptions, 1st or 2nd Drafts
According to the results, in the 1st, 2nd, and final drafts, students report that they are getting more feedback than teachers report in giving in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. For example, as shown in the ‘mechanics’ category of 1st and 2nd drafts, a majority of students reported that they received “a lot (100%)” or “some (70%)” feedback, whereas all teachers reported giving only “some (30%)” or “no (0%)” feedback. Since teachers report that they are giving feedback selectively, we can therefore see that there is a mismatch in the perceptions of students and teachers about the amount of feedback given and received. It is interesting to note that this discrepancy in students’ and teachers’ perceptions is not apparent in the categories of organization and content/ideas. It seems that when asked about these areas of feedback amount, teachers and students generally agree on the amount that they are giving and receiving.

This finding is ambiguous in terms of an explanation. It could mean that students think that they are getting feedback on everything when they are not, and they will assume that all errors are marked, so that when they fix those errors, their papers will be error free. However, this explanation is unlikely, judging from other findings in the literature. Specifically,
Montgomery & Baker (2007) found that in many cases when teachers’ perceptions were less than students’ perceptions of written feedback, the teachers were underestimating the amount that they give, rather than the students overestimating. Likewise, in Lee’s (2004) study, many teachers were reporting that they gave “selective” feedback, but when actual feedback practices were examined she found that they were marking comprehensively. Such findings may suggest that teachers should self-monitor their feedback practices, checking how much feedback they give.

*RQ 2: How content are students with the amount of feedback that they are receiving, and by comparison do teachers believe that their students are satisfied or dissatisfied with their feedback?*

The survey shows that an overwhelming number of students, 74.5%, are satisfied with the amount of feedback that they are receiving, while a majority of teachers, 80%, reported that their students are only “somewhat” satisfied (Figure 3).
In analyzing the amount of student satisfaction by each individual class, all classes had a fairly high rate of satisfaction, ranging from 50% to 100%. Four of the six classes had high response rates that were all within a small range between 71% and 81% students reporting satisfaction. By contrast, the class each with the highest and the lowest scores for satisfaction was also a group with the lowest response rates. The extreme and atypical responses are likely to be related to the small number size of respondents in these two groups.

It is an encouraging statistic that students are mostly satisfied with the amount of feedback that they are receiving. By comparison, however, more teachers felt that students were only “somewhat” satisfied with the amount of feedback they gave. I attribute this high number to the anxiety that many teachers feel about the effectiveness of feedback practices and students’ perceptions of such. This finding reflects the researcher’s perception while conducting the study that the teachers who participated in the study seemed very concerned with the feelings and progress of their students.

When asked what they prefer for the teacher to do, 75% of students elected that the teacher give feedback on “all” errors, while only 21% preferred teachers to give “some” feedback. This reveals that students have a strong preference to receive global feedback. This finding is contrary to some recent research concerning global comments. Leki (2006) suggested that students reported feeling that they are not receiving enough comments on global issues from teachers. The present study suggests that these students feel that they are receiving enough comments on global issues such as ideas, content, and organization, as most students reported that they received “a lot” or “some” comments in these areas. One fundamental difference between the present study and Leki (2006) is that Leki was examining students’ perception of
regular discipline classes whereas I am examining practices in an ESL classroom. This may explain some discrepancies in the two study’s findings.

When asked how much progress students were making with semester, majorities of both the six teachers and their students reported that they were making “some” progress this semester. To be specific, 65% of students and 66% of teachers feel that students are making some progress. The perceptions of both students and teachers match, and are relatively positive. This, combined with the fact that most students are satisfied with the amount of feedback they get, indicates that students are generally positive about their ELI writing classes.

*RQ 3: How favorably are various techniques for the delivery of feedback viewed by students?*

One of the primary motivations of this study was to ask which techniques teachers were using and to draw correlates between practices and student satisfaction. I expected that this would allow me to show underlying preferences for certain types of feedback over others, essentially finding which methods were more preferable to both students and teachers. Specifically, I examined the (self-reported) type of error correction a teacher uses, correction codes, and a variety of other feedback follow up methods, such a conferences and error frequency charts and compared these practices with the satisfaction level of the students in individual classes, and by course number.

Admittedly, the present design did not lend itself to uncovering direct connections between self-reported teacher practices and the satisfaction level of students. Nevertheless, the research uncovered that many different methods are used in these writing classrooms. There are several factors that come into play when teachers choose how to implement their feedback practices. Most teachers reported that they select the errors that they mark on an ad hoc, case by
case basis, taking other factors into consideration such as time constraints and student needs. All (100%) teachers reported that all three of the following considerations affect their error feedback techniques; students’ requests, perception of students’ needs, and the amount of time available. Moreover, 100% of the teachers surveyed reported that they spend more than 20 minutes marking each composition.

Teachers also responded to a variety of questions about the type of error correction they use, their follow-up practices, and their beliefs about feedback about the types of feedback practices that they implement. As shown in Table 3, which reflects how many teachers chose each answer, error feedback practices vary greatly. Because teachers could indicate as many or as few practices as they wanted, some of teachers did not mark certain categories. It seems that most teachers surveyed employ a variety of feedback practices.

Table 3  
*Teachers’ Error Correction Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do you use the following error feedback techniques?</th>
<th>Never or rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often or always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I indicate errors and correct them</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I indicate errors, correct them and categorize them</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I indicate errors, but I don’t correct them</td>
<td></td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I indicate errors and categorize them but I don’t correct them</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hint at the location of errors</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hint at the location of errors and categorize them</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the error practices reported in Table 3, 50% of teachers reported using a marking code to highlight the types of errors that their students are making. The two teachers
whose students reported the highest and the lowest percent of satisfaction both reported that they regularly use a marking code, similar follow-up techniques, and had closely matching beliefs. Therefore, using a marking code does not seem to raise students’ satisfaction levels in regards to feedback.

Teachers also report that they use various follow-up methods with feedback, such as student-teacher conferences, encouraging students to keep an error chart, and going over common errors in class. Once again, these practices were used in different amounts by different teachers. When asked about their beliefs, five out of six teachers reported that not all student errors should be treated equally. These beliefs support the fact that the teachers reported using all different types of error analysis and follow-up techniques. They probably vary their practices depending on the student needs, preferences, and error type.

This finding was unexpected because it is contradictory to Lee (2004), from which part of the survey used in this research was adopted. Whereas she found that teachers use only limited strategies in their feedback practices, I found that teachers reported using various strategies. One reason that these findings are contradictory may be because the teachers surveyed in Lee’s study 80% were using a school-mandated correction code. They were told what to do and how to do it when it came to feedback practices. In stark contrast, none of the teachers involved in the present study were using a mandated system of feedback practices. These teachers were allowed to select and implement their own methods, and therefore had a wide range of methodologies. Also, Lee’s study examined actual practices along with perceptions. If actual practices were studied in this case, the self-reported behaviors may differ from actual practices.

The students consistently report satisfaction with amount of feedback independent of which feedback method their teacher practices. In fact, when the data were divided by the three
levels of ELI writing (mixed undergraduate and graduate low-level; undergraduate advanced level; and graduate advanced level), the number of students who were satisfied with their teachers’ feedback ranged between 66% and 84%, a high percentage. Of the students who reported that their teacher uses a marking code, 74% said they prefer that the teacher use a marking code, while only 11% indicated that they would not like their teacher to use a code. Of the students who reported that their teacher does not use a marking code, 62% said that they would not like their teacher to use a code while 31% said that they would like a marking code. This seems to indicate that students tend to be persuaded by the method that their teacher is using. This can be supported by Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) who have claimed that “‘learners’ expectations and preferences may derive from previous instructional experiences, experiences that may not necessarily be beneficial for the development of writing’” (p. 173).

RQ 4: Whose job is to correct errors, according to students and teachers?

An intriguing finding of this study is that students and teachers place the burden of error correction on each other. As Table 4 indicates, when asked about whose job it is to locate and correct errors, a majority of students said that it was the teacher’s job to locate and correct errors, while only 37% said that it is the student’s job to locate and correct errors. On the other side, 83% of the teachers disagreed that it is the teacher’s job to locate and correct errors. All of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “students should learn to locate and correct their own errors.”
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility for error correction</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is mainly the teacher’s job to locate and correct errors for students.</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is mainly the student’s job to locate and correct their own errors.</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility for error correction</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is mainly the teacher’s job to locate and correct errors for students.</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should learn to locate and correct their own errors.</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ and teachers’ beliefs about who should locate and correct errors are quite different, and indicate that teachers should be aware that students believe that error correction is the teacher’s duty. If the teacher (for whatever reason) is not going to highlight and correct errors, I suggest that they explain their beliefs and method to students so they can understand the teacher’s practices.

Conclusion

This study presents some implications for pedagogy in ESL writing classes. The teachers in this study felt that students were only somewhat satisfied with the amount of feedback they are giving. The results of this study suggest that teachers need not have anxiety over feedback amount and method type. As mentioned earlier, there were no specific methods found to be more well-received by students. Therefore, teachers should stay with the practices that work for them and not worry that students will not be satisfied. Furthermore, teachers should self-monitor their feedback practices and occasionally review whether their error correction methods are aligned with their beliefs. While a majority of teachers supported the idea that error correction should be selective, it may be that these teachers still correct globally. Finally, teachers should be made
aware that a majority of students place the duty of error correction on their teachers. Once aware of this, teachers may be able to counteract this perception in class by using more peer feedback techniques or by helping the students to develop an autonomous review and correction cycle.

As with any study, there are several limitations in the present one. One of the limitations of this study is that all responses are self-reported. In future research, it would be interesting to see whether actual practices are consistent with self-reported practices. As stated above, Lee (2004) found that teachers were less selective in their error correction than they self-reported that they were. In other words, they believed that their error correction was selective, whereas in actual practice, it was global. One question that arises from these findings is: are students satisfied with feedback because they believe that they are receiving more than they are actually given? Or are teachers giving comprehensive feedback in spite of their beliefs to give selective feedback? These questions might be answered if actual feedback practices were examined, rather than only self-reported estimates.

Another limitation is that there are unknown factors that may effect students’ perceptions of their teachers. It is possible that if students strongly like or dislike their teacher, they will have the same relationship with the feedback that the teacher gives. Furthermore, the ELI classes that are being surveyed do not have necessarily homogenous populations. Some students are graduate students while others are undergraduate students and have probably had very different past experiences in feedback. Also, some of the courses are pass/fail completion classes and others are more high-stakes, as students receive credit. As mentioned above, one of the major limitations of this study is that practices measured were all self-reported. In further research, actual practices should be compared with self-reported practices. Other possibilities for further
research include examining not only student satisfaction level of feedback amount, but other types of feedback options such as peer review, student-teacher conferences, and self-correction.

Richards (1998) said that “rather than viewing the development of teaching skill as the mastery of general principles and theories that have been determined by others, the acquisition of teaching expertise is seen to be a process that involves the teacher in actively constructing a personal and workable theory of teaching” (p. 65). This study was enlightening because the data suggest that most students are satisfied with the amount, and generally, the type of feedback they receive. This has eased my own anxiety about my feedback practices and helped me realize that there are probably no “best” practices or methods when it comes to feedback methodology. Additionally, I would be interested in the further examination of teacher beliefs in comparison with actual practices, and student perceptions of follow-up methods of teacher feedback such as student-teacher conferences. By better understanding some of these issues, teachers can design and implement more effective methods in their classrooms and researchers can understand the complex relationship between teachers and students in the process of feedback.
References


Goldstein, L. (2001). For Kyla: What does the research say about responding to ESL writers?. In T. Silva and P. Matsuda (Eds.), *On second language writing* (pp. 73–90), Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.


Appendix A: Consent Form

Agreement to participate in a survey of students’ and teacher’s perceptions on feedback practices in the ELI.

Ann Johnstun
Primary Investigator
398-1156

This research project is being conducted as a component of the SLS 650 Second Language Acquisition course. The purpose of the project is to survey teachers’ and students’ beliefs and perceptions about written feedback in the second language classroom and compare the perceptions. This study intends to help teachers better understand whether their feedback practices are useful to the students. You are being asked to participate in this survey as a student or teacher of an ELI writing course.

Participation in the project will consist of answering a short survey. The survey will focus on the amount of comments you receive / give on written assignments and how useful they are to you. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results. Completion of the survey, including some background data questions should take no more than 10 minutes. Others who will participate in this study include other students and teachers currently in the ELI.

The investigator believes there is little or no risk to participating in this research project. Participating in this research may have some direct benefits for you, as the results may benefit teachers and future students of this program.

As compensation for time spent participating in the research project, you will receive a treat after the survey.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. Agencies with research oversight, such as the UH Committee on Human Studies, have the authority to review research data. All research records will be stored in a locked file in the primary investigators’ office for the duration of the research project and will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project with no penalty, or loss of benefit to which you would otherwise be entitled.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the researcher, Ann Johnstun at 398-1156.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the UH Committee on Human Studies at (808)956-5007, or uhirb@hawaii.edu
Appendix B Student Survey

Answer the questions.
1. Where are you from? ______________________
2. What is your native language? ______________________
3. How old are you? ______________________
4. How long have you been in the USA? Years _______ Months ________
5. How long have you been studying at the ELI? Semesters ________

Choose the answer that describes what you think. Choose only one answer.
1. How much of each essay do you read over again when your teacher returns it to you?
   
   1st or 2nd drafts
   All of it          Most of it          Some of it          None of it
   
   Final drafts
   All of it          Most of it          Some of it          None of it

2. How many of your teacher’s comments and corrections do you think about carefully?
   
   1st or 2nd drafts
   All of it          Most of it          Some of it          None of it
   
   Final drafts
   All of it          Most of it          Some of it          None of it

3. How many of your teacher’s comments on your essay are about:
   
   1st or 2nd drafts
   Organization      A lot         Some          A little        None
   Content/Ideas     A lot         Some          A little        None
   Grammar          A lot         Some          A little        None
   Vocabulary       A lot         Some          A little        None
   Mechanics        A lot         Some          A little        None
   (punctuation and spelling)
   
   Final drafts
   Organization      A lot         Some          A little        None
   Content/Ideas     A lot         Some          A little        None
   Grammar          A lot         Some          A little        None
   Vocabulary       A lot         Some          A little        None
   Mechanics        A lot         Some          A little        None
   (punctuation and spelling)

Please circle the appropriate answers.
4. Are you satisfied with the overall amount of comments you receive?
   a. yes
   b. no
   c. somewhat
d. I don’t know

5. Which of the following is true about your 1st or 2nd drafts?
   a. My English teacher underlines / circles all my errors.
   b. My English teacher underlines / circles some of my errors.
   c. My English teacher does not underline / circle any of my errors.
   d. I have no idea about the above.

6. Which of the following is true about your final draft?
   a. My English teacher underlines / circles all my errors.
   b. My English teacher underlines / circles some of my errors.
   c. My English teacher does not underline / circle any of my errors.
   d. I have no idea about the above.

7. Before / After marking your essays, does your teacher tell you what error types (e.g., verbs, prepositions, spelling) he/she has selected to mark?
   a. yes
   b. no

8. Which of the following do you like best on your 1st or 2nd drafts?
   a. My English teacher underlines / circles all my errors.
   b. My English teacher underlines / circles some of my errors.
   c. My English teacher does not underline / circle any of my errors.

9. Which of the following do you like best on your final draft?
   a. My English teacher underlines / circles all my errors.
   b. My English teacher underlines / circles some of my errors.
   c. My English teacher does not underline / circle any of my errors.

10. Does your teacher use a correction code in marking your essays (i.e. using symbols like V. , Adj., etc., or using colors to highlight different errors)?
    a. yes
    b. no

If your answer to Question 10 is “Yes,” answer Question 11 and 12. If your answer is “No,” go to Question 13.

11. What percentage of your teacher’s marking symbols (e.g., V, Adj, Voc, Sp) are you able to follow and understand when you are correcting errors in your essays?
    a. 76-100%
    b. 51-75%
    c. 26-50%
    d. 0-25%

12. What percentage of errors are you able to correct with the help of your teacher’s marking symbols?
    a. 76-100%
    b. 51-75%
    c. 26-50%
    d. 0-25%
13. Do you want your teacher to use a correction code in marking your essays?
   a. yes
   b. no

14. After your teacher has corrected errors in your essays, do you think you will make the same errors again when you get a new writing assignment?
   a. yes
   b. no

15. Which of the following is true?
   a. In this semester, I am making good progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.
   b. In this semester, I am making some progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.
   c. In this semester, I am making little progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.
   d. In this semester, I am making no progress in grammatical accuracy in writing.

16. Which of the following do you agree with?
   a. It is mainly the teacher’s job to locate and correct errors for students.
   b. It is mainly the student’s job to locate and correct their own errors.
Appendix C: Teacher Survey

1. How long have you been teaching at the ELI? Semesters _______

2. Secondary Teaching experience:
   - Less than 5 years
   - 5-10 years
   - over 10 years

3. How many of your comments on student’s essays are about:
   - 1st or 2nd drafts
     - A lot (100%)
     - Some
     - A little
     - None
   - Organization
   - Content/Ideas
   - Grammar
   - Vocabulary
   - Mechanics
   (punctuation and spelling)

   - Final drafts
     - A lot
     - Some
     - A little
     - None
   - Organization
   - Content/Ideas
   - Grammar
   - Vocabulary
   - Mechanics
   (punctuation and spelling)

4. Do you think that your students are satisfied with the amount of comments you give?
   a. yes
   b. no
   c. somewhat
   d. I don’t know

5. Which of the statements below best describes your existing error feedback practice on your students’ 1st or 2nd drafts?
   a. I don’t mark students’ errors in writing.
   b. I mark ALL students’ errors.
   c. I mark students’ errors selectively.

6. Which of the statements below best describes your existing error feedback practice on your students’ final drafts?
   a. I don’t mark students’ errors in writing.
   b. I mark ALL students’ errors.
   c. I mark students’ errors selectively.

If your answer to Question 5 is “C,” answer Questions 7, 8, and 9. If you have not ticked “C,” go to question 10.
7. Circle the amount of errors you mark.
   a. About 1/3
   b. About 2/3
   c. More than 2/3

8. Which of the following best describes the major principles for error selection?
   a. The selected errors are directly linked to grammar instruction in class – e.g. after I have taught subject-verb agreement, I provide feedback on subject-verb agreement errors.
   b. The selected errors are related to students’ specific needs – e.g. knowing that students are particularly weak in articles, I provide feedback on article errors.
   c. The errors are selected on an ad hoc basis – i.e. I decide what errors to provide feedback on while I am marking.
   d. Others (please specify)_________________________________________________________________

9. Are your students aware of the type(s) of errors you select to provide feedback on?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. Do you use a marking code for providing error feedback on student writing?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. Does your school require you to use a marking code?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. Rate the frequency with which you use each of the following error feedback techniques according to the scale below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often do you use the following error feedback techniques?</th>
<th>Never or rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often or always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I indicate (underline/circle) errors and correct them – e.g. has went gone.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I indicate (underline/circle) errors, correct them and categorize them (with the help of a marking code) – e.g. has went gone. (verb form)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I indicate (underline/circle) errors, but I don’t correct them – e.g. has went.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I indicate (underline/circle) errors and categorize them (with the help of a marking code), but I don’t correct them – e.g. has went. (verb form)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
e. I hint at the location of errors – e.g. by putting a mark in the margin to indicate an error on a specific line.

f. I hint at the location of errors and categorize them (with the help of a marking code) – e.g. by writing ‘Prep’ in the margin to indicate a preposition error on a specific line.

13. What factors influence the error feedback technique(s) you always/ often use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors affecting the error feedback techniques I always/ often use.</th>
<th>Yes or No?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Students’ request – i.e. students ask for it</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. My perception of students’ needs</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The amount of time I have</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Others (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. What do you usually do after you mark students’ compositions? You can check more than one box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I usually do after marking students’ writing</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I do not do anything</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I hold a conference with each student/ some students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I make students correct errors in/ outside class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. I make students record their errors in an error frequency chart.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. I go through students’ common errors in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Others (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. How much time approximately do you spend marking one composition?

a. Less than 10 minutes
b. 10 to 20 minutes
c. More than 20 minutes

16. How would you evaluate the overall effectiveness of your existing error feedback practice on student progress in grammatical accuracy in writing during this semester?

My students are making
17. **Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements according to the scale below.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. There is no need for teachers to provide feedback on student errors in writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Teachers should provide feedback on student errors selectively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. It is the teacher’s job to locate errors and provide corrections for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Teachers should vary their error feedback techniques according to the type of error</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Coding errors with the help of a marking code is a useful means of helping students correct errors for themselves.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Marking codes should be easy for students to follow and understand.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. All student errors deserve equal attention.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Students should learn to locate and correct their own errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Students should learn to locate and correct their own errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Students should learn to analyze their own errors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Do you have any concerns and/or problems providing error feedback on student writing? Please elaborate.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Appendix D: Request for teachers’ permission
Dear ELI writing teacher:

My name is Ann Johnstun, and I am interested in conducting a survey that involves both you as an ELI writing teacher, and your ELI students. The purpose of the project is to survey teachers’ and students’ beliefs and perceptions about written feedback in the second language classroom and compare the perceptions.

Participation in the project will consist of answering a short survey for students, and a little longer survey for teachers. The survey will focus on the amount of comments you give on written assignments and how useful they are to you. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results. This survey seeks to answer the following research questions: what is the relationship between teacher self-assessments and student perceptions of teacher written feedback? What types of feedback are currently being used? Are students content with the type and amount of feedback that they are receiving? Do teachers’ feedback practices reflect their beliefs?

After the study is completed, I intend on sharing my results with you as a teacher so that you might better understand how your feedback practices are perceived by your students. I will be contacting you soon to know whether or not you agree to participate in this research. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project.

Thank you,

Ann Johnstun